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Gloria  
Victis.

MORILLA  
NORTON.













**GLORIA VICTIS**

✓  
Mabel M. Norton



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MORILLA M. NORTON

*M. M. Norton, N.H.*

(55)



U. M. P., May 19, 1922

To the memory of  
PHILLIPS BROOKS,  
Bishop of Massachusetts,  
whose impassioned presentation of the  
Old Testament  
gave it, to a child's imagination,  
life and speech;  
to the hopes, and their fulfillment, of the  
mighty race whose ideals  
made the New Testament possible,  
I dedicate this drama.



## PROLOGUE.



The title of this play is taken from Antonin Mercié's "Gloria Victis" in the Hôtel de Ville, Paris; its motif is that of the book of Esther: this acknowledges any conscious indebtedness. If there is found in it but a trace of the beauty of the master's work, but a breath of the life of the Great Chronicle, the author is content.

M. N.

## CHARACTERS.

AHASUERUS, King of the Medes and Persians.

MORDECAI, a Jew of the Court in immediate service of the King.

HAMAN, a Noble and Agagite.

MEMUCAN, Prince of Media and Persia.

HEGAI, King's chamberlain.

HATACH, a friend of Esther and Mordecai.

VASHTI, Queen of Ahasuerus.

ESTHER, Queen of Ahasuerus.

JUDITH, a friend of Esther.

ZERESH, wife of Haman.

CARSHENA,	}	Princes of Persia.
SHETHAR,		
ADMATHA,		
TARSHISH,		
MERES,		
MARSENA,		

MEHUMAN,	}	Chamberlains.
BIZTHA,		
HARBONA,		
BIGTHA,		
ABAGTHA,		
ZETHAR,		
CARCAS,		

DALPHON,	}	Conspirators with Haman.
ASPATHA,		
ADALIA,		

Chorus, Persian Musicians, Scribes, Eunuchs,  
Maids in attendance on Vashti and Esther,  
Household Servants, etc.

SCENES. Palace at Shushan, house of Haman, and street before the palace.

## GLORIA VICTIS.



### ACT FIRST.

SCENE I.—Palace of Shushan. A court filled with flowers and fountains, surrounded by an arcade. Occasionally a servant, sometimes an usher, a eunuch, a taster, or one of the king's guards, passes, each in evident haste and bearing vessels of gold, gold and silver vases, candelabra, etc. Two Jews converse near one of the pillars of the arcade.

FIRST JEW. What means this ardor? Shall we tonight be asked to heathen revels? Will the tyrant deck himself in spoils of Zion?

SECOND JEW. Yea, 'twould seem, for see we not the sacred vessels, purpled once with wine of Eshcol, crimsoned at the Pascal feast, now borne into this board, and kings dare drink where priests quenched not their thirst?

FIRST JEW (raising his hands in imprecation). Ah, Israel, Israel! thy cups once red, now brown with dregs and lees like the foul, stanchless wounds our heroes bore for thee, are brimming o'er with "wine of trembling." Ah, for a draught of that pure water, sweeter far than this of Choaspes, our mighty men did bring to David, and he did pour to God! Choaspes cannot assuage this thirst for home. My eyes are wells and from their depths are daily drawn draughts bitterer far than those of *Ma-rah*.

SECOND JEW. Already hath the king received his meed at Salamis, and Grecian heroes spilled the dearest blood of Persia. Why may not one deliver us? some Joshua, who took kings as spoil; Gideon, hero naked and unblazoned; not as these, whose leather

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banner myriads led, upon a weaker foe. Perchance some one may come to give his life, to prove his faith, and set against this empty earthly crown, the King of kings. What sayest thou, father?

FIRST JEW. Yea, I do hope for it. Why should we not teach him there is a God, who mocks at greatness built on aught but justice? Had we the heroes thou hast named 'twould be so now. Exile doth leave a hero half a man, and men as children. O, Daniel, Daniel! thou didst sit with kings their counselor; who can counsel men since thou art gone?

SECOND JEW. But here's the Chorus. All our holiest pulses beat in rhythm with their strains.

SCENE II.—CHORUS chanting in minor key crosses the stage, halting near a vine-covered arch leading into the court beyond, opposite entrance to banquet hall.

PSALMS XIII.

How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;

Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.

I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

FIRST JEW. More we cannot ask for comfort—but look, hither doth come a man who loves us, and one who loves us not—Mordecai and Haman. Hast seen of late the looks of scorn the favorite lowers upon the chosen? “Under the shadow of thy wings”; 'twere well,



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ah well, to lift up hands for help, for such as he, whate'er their mien, mean harm.

SECOND JEW. Seest thou how he doth look at Mordecai? His eyes do gleam with scorn and hate, but he who loves his God, much more than place and pomp, is more than match for Haman.

FIRST JEW. Yea, more than match, with God. Will He avenge us here on Persian soil?

SECOND JEW. Let us go hence and look upon this feast, and judge from favor there bestowed, who rules the king. [Exit Jews.]

HAMAN approaches the pillar they have left.

MORDECAI stands talking to the CHORUS.

HAMAN. I see him and I hate him. This captive, insolent, with meekness ill assumed, protects himself from envy while his power grows daily. I'll see which man is master, he a slave, or I, a favorite. Had I one here as brave as he is subtle, I could prove whose gods are mightiest, his or mine. A woman, yea, where find her? Zeresh waits upon the queen, but Vashti's reign is past: a pretext, she's dismissed, —who then will share the couch and touch the sceptre? Capricious, vindictive, this hour his friend, the next his toy. Who knows then? Who but knows? I must to the feast.

[Exit HAMAN.]

MORDECAI passes out before the CHORUS,  
which follows chanting softly

PSALMS XCIX.

The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble:  
he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth  
be moved.

The Lord is great in Zion; and he is high  
above all the people.

Let them praise thy great and terrible name;  
for it is holy.

The king's strength also loveth judgment;  
thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment  
and righteousness in Jacob.

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Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.

Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the Lord, and he answered them. — — (CHORUS heard softly chanting in the distance.)

SCENE III.—Banquet hall of palace, hung in white, green, and blue. Beds of gold and silver upon pavement of red, blue, white and black marble, marble pillars whose capitals are massive heads of bulls. Beside the empty throne of gold and silver, is seen the royal standard of Persia, leather encrusted with gems. The guests, princes of Persia, chamberlains, courtiers, Greeks, Jews, Parthians, are reclining on couches, HAMAN and MORDECAI next the King. Ushers, tasters, eunuchs, and servants, wait upon the company. Persian musicians play softly, Jewish Chorus holding their instruments, is seen standing near portico leading to the garden, which can be seen beyond.

KING AHASUERUS. What need we here to grace this festival, where Persia's gems are gleaming, but her whose beauty is as creamy pearl, mid jewels. Like a star that shines alone on Demavend, that beauty fills the heaven of Persia's monarch. She holds her court apart; the lustrous constellation of her women leaves these halls in darkness. 'Tis meet we call her thence to light our gloom. Go call the queen.

(All drinking to the sound of trumpets, "O King, Live Forever!")

HAMAN. O King, and can it be that she on whom the sun itself doth deign to shine, should seek the shade?

KING. Nay, she but deems herself a lesser orb, the center of a constellation smaller, but more bright. Her rays may cast less far, but give more light and heat. The mind of Vashti lets no sun but that which from the throne

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irradiates, shine down her splendor, and she doth well—what sayest thou Mordecai?

MORDECAI. The man should rule the woman; that, O King, were ancient law, but both are under rule. It means but good for each to pay to either homage, being subject both to God, and in our law 'tis meekness best doth crown the kingliest brow.

KING. Thy God, thy law! What canst thou teach, O noble Jew to me, descended from a god, immortal like themselves? Yet almost I might wish to learn of thee, my captive, so much wisdom oft I find within thy speech. Our women are our jewels and we like them best to glitter and adorn—for when they lose their brilliancy, we can replace them.

HAMAN. Or flowers, when faded, we can pluck them fresh.

MORDECAI. How their souls, ye count not they have souls O King?

KING. Yea, Mordecai, their souls exhale in merriment, delight, caress, and soothing tenderness. The soul of man requires a taste of many sweets. His palate is not satisfied with a single fruit, or one confection. — — — — See we here upon this table, gathered from as many gardens, dainties wrought by Nature in her hours of glee. She hath formed them for our pleasure, and we take them as she means them—each and all.

MORDECAI. We hold the woman is for man a sister, friend, who can appeal unto the highest, best within him, and though weak and yielding, give him strength of purpose, love of truth and God. She reflects the best in man, and gives an image pure, as is his purest thought of her.

KING. Perhaps, — — What! comes she not, the queen? (King half rises, startled.)

MESSENGER (Hegai, a chamberlain). O King live forever! Thine august queen doth bid me lay before thy throne of splendor this her will—she will not come.

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KING (in fierce anger, aside). She will not come! (Rises and approaches the throne.) (Aside.) O Vashti cross not thy lesser rays with mine. (Aloud.) What shall we do unto the queen for her affront to royal will?

MEMUCAN. O King the queen has done this wrong not only unto thee, but unto us, and unto Persia. There shall be wrath and scorn in Media, when our wives obey not. Let her estate be given then and by decree unto another, then every husband dwells in honor.

KING. Yea, so shall it be, and thou hast answered wisely, Memucan. Saidst thou not so, my Mordecai? Ah, let the Chorus sing, for I am heavy-hearted.

CHORUS advances to side of the throne and commences to chant in a brighter strain.

PROVERBS XXXI.

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. — — —

Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

KING (to MORDECAI). Are all the women virtuous in thy land, or are there those who love to rule and be a curse and bane to life?

MORDECAI. O King 'tis God alone can give to her, whose nature weak, demands a stronger, the power of righteous life. (Musing.) Some such we have had, some may have again—there are who might be such.

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KING. Then would I might have her for wife, to rule with me, obedient, loving, chaste.

MORDECAI (aside). There may be such an one, and yet, O Esther! O my child!

[King rises, bearing sceptre, passes out, nobles following.]

SCENE IV.—In Vashti's apartment, women at a banquet rise from the tables and frightened gaze at the queen, watching her face closely. She is seen reclining on a golden couch, dressed in elaborate court costume, crimson embroidered in gold and silver. Messenger enters, breathless from fear,

VASHTI. What saith the king?

MESSENGER. Ah Mistress, would thou hadst but learned before to dread his wrath, for now 'tis burning hot and like to scorch. He will not have a wife who rules beyond his law, and now advised by his court will put thee hence.

ALL. Ah, told we thee not so? O woe, thy doom has come! (Some of the women weep.)

VASHTI. Cease; not by me shall tears be shed. I am a queen and will be such in grief, and 'tis not his to take one jot from my estate as queen. Misfortune makes a royal soul more royal, nothing less. 'Tis my will that breaks against his own; no two can rule beneath this roof and both be safe. His mind grasps undivided sway, and he and all his haughty race accept not nay. I leave him to his lonely throne and power. Do ye leave me. (Women retire, leaving Vashti who half in rage half sadly soliloquizes.) Ah yes, once loved, now scorned. 'Twas beauty gave me rule, not love, and beauty's rule is brief. I could have held my place, would I but stoop to artifice as all do here and trust to basest means to hold their power. 'Twere something, yea 'twere much, to vent my spite on some who feed and grow on others' ill. Had I but one friend here at court, by grief and envy stung, I might regain that place. (Musing.) Ah yea, my mind doth clear a way within these



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toils—that false ambitious Haman—he's ready for the depths of guilt; that doubt I not—and she, his wife, doth wait upon the queen. Ah splendors once possessed, but half remembered, haunting my waking hours of gloom with rays of soft delights. (Goes to the window leading to the gardens.) When shall I hear such music as these nightingales pour to this crystal moon? Ah heavens ye told my span of joy was brief—ye fooled me not—'tis men have cheated me. Ah well, this place of lying, tricking deeds, and fiercer thoughts, I shall not much regret; yet this burning thirst for power, — — — insatiable passion! 'Tis his curse and mine. I see a hand within the dusk will strike him down, as he has struck me. I'll keep my grief till then, but now my queenly pride will leave no minute's, second's place for one to say, "I pity her, the queen." — — 'Tis choice, I could say, "I obey," and stay. I would not, testing him, be slave—I go. But who comes here? 'Tis she, 'tis Zeresh. (Half scornfully.) What bringst thou here, my Zeresh? (aside) the first to spy on power o'er-thrown.

SCENE V.

ZERESH. What mistress, what but that I bring thee sympathy.

VASHTI (impatiently). Sympathy! 'tis brought where it is wanted not, and if it were, the queen would seek it first amid her peers.

ZERESH (dissembling her anger). 'Tis as thy slave I offer what a slave may surely bring: desire to share misfortune.

VASHTI. That desire were alien to most slaves—and kings. That both may rise to further greatness through this seeming check 'tis this that I consent to.

ZERESH (visibly pleased). 'Tis, gracious queen, most like to thee to give what none can give but thou—a queenly courage. My husband sends me thither to inform his august



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sovereign there doth beat one true heart still for her. Command him; 'tis this he craves alone.

VASHTI (aside). There spoke the woman, and I find my weapon ready forged. (Aloud.) Tell Haman that his queen is still a queen, in fearlessness, and intends to try the humor of the king yet further. Go tell him this and bid him meet her here in secret—for see they come to bring me to the king.

[Exit ZERESH. Enter Herald and Princes.

VASHTI (rises in majestic pose, all saluting). Ye great of Persia, now 'tis Vashti's will.

[All leave after the queen.



## ACT SECOND.

SCENE I.—Bedroom in Esther's suite in the palace of Shushan. A young girl of rare grace and loveliness, just awake, rises from her couch. She throws a mantle over her shoulders and approaches the window, stretching out her hands, as if in invocation to the sunrise.

ESTHER. O splendor, glory most like Him—our King in Zion. When I do feel thee around me, I am part of heaven and spheres far far beyond our little life enfold me—the splendor is't within, without? I cannot tell. God is so near, our dread Jehovah. — — — I wish I had arisen early, gone upon the hills and breathed the light, perfume, from all the world alone with Him. Could I but reach some highest point and lift my two girl hands to sky and field and feel again, I'm free! Ah, joy to feel but air about me, unveiled, to catch the light upon my hair, so feeding all my soul with ecstasy. I'd find Him there and He'd perhaps release me. A captive, O! to live and die a captive! Some nights I breathless lie and hear a voice low breathing, and I swoon in gladness. 'Tis His voice which says—a mother

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must so speak, so tenderly—"He that Israel keeps shall never sleep." Last night I heard that voice again and I awoke and mighty dreams half shaken from my eyelids kept me company. — — — Did David so sense God in dawn? Yea, did he not? It comes to me his song — — "My voice in the morning shalt thou hear, O Lord, my prayer to thee will I direct."

Prays——

Ah, here's the sun, he likens to a bridegroom (hesitates confused) coming from his chamber. — — — Ah me no mother is here to quiet me with loving hands. I must meet this, as all things else alone. I am orphaned too in country. From time my baby hands could clasp in prayer I've prayed for thee Jerusalem, thine altars and thy throne. — Could it be? — No, no,—I'm far too weak. — I faint at thought of him, this heathen tyrant, — — — yet some voice within me says, "I am with thee, fear thee not," Is't He, the King of kings? I think of Ruth. She too was gentle, timid, meek, and she found favor. Ah God! give me thy strength. Hide me beneath thy wings! (Dresses. Hears Chorus outside her windows, claps her hands and listens eagerly.

## SONG OF SOLOMON.

My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

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Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.

My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.

Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

SCENE II.—A knock. Judith enters; the girls embrace.

ESTHER. Brave girl, then they did let thee come to Esther? Thou didst pass the palace gates unharmed?

JUDITH. Yea, yea, unharmed. Mordecai did give his word—'tis law it seems since Esther's here. (Esther hides her head on Judith's neck.)

JUDITH. Ah mistress happy, happy, be thou love—'tis he the king has sent thee hither, our sweet singers.

ESTHER. Foolish child, the song is sweet, but what if I am scorned?

JUDITH. Nay, nay, for no such being oped her eyes today in Persia—for thy dear cheeks, and hair and eyes, he'd ransom half his kingdom.

ESTHER. Child, child, vex me not thus, with praise undue, unmeet.

JUDITH. Sweet mistress 'tis but truth I tell thee, for have I not seen the queen, so proud, so careless of us girls who gazed awestruck upon her beauty? For she was fair, dressed all in gold, upon her head a diadem, and ladies dressed in cloth of gold, like butterflies about her. — Thou art twice as fair without the gold. (Finishes dressing Esther's hair. A knock; both girls start.)

ESTHER. Hast finished? 'Tis well, I hear my uncle's knock—one minute, Judith thou wilt stay with me (kisses her) so I may have some one to love within this palace, yea, then I'll forgive thy foolish praise. (JUDITH breaks from her and goes to the door. MORDECAI enters; girls bow low before him; ESTHER kisses his hand.)

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MORDECAI. My child, my well-beloved child. (Aside.) As Abraham led his son to sacrifice, so lead I her, believing God means well.

ESTHER. Be not thou sad, father; I will be good and here, as there, obey. Who knows but God will work through me His will for Israel?

MORDECAI. Yea, yea, mayhap, but we must wait upon His will, and oftentimes that will seems grief to us. I love thee, Esther, (takes her in his arms) thou art part of loves immortal, and to know thy tender feet set here in snares the rudest may entangle—troubles me.

CHORUS without, chanting Psalms xc.

— — — — —

O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.

Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

MORDECAI and ESTHER stand with bowed heads, listening.

ESTHER. Father, hath He not spoken? Can we then fear?

MORDECAI. Yea, Esther, He has spoken. We will hear. I leave you with our King.

SCENE III.—A room in Vashti's suite. Haman alone.

HAMAN. Yea, Mordecai, I curse thee, and thy race; not yesterday, nor yesterday before, put enmity between us. Saul slew my kin, and Samuel hewed our mighty king before his god. I hold as living hate, a memory more hateful.

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I stand beside the throne—thou wouldst stand there—there is not place for two. Thou bringst a girl to play her part; I bring a queen, one wronged, insulted, eager for revenge—match Persian princess with a Jewish maid. — — — Three of the greatest of the realm stand with us. Ha! soon thou'lt feel a foe in every Persian. — — — They come, my friends, the queen and Zeresh, Aspatha, Adalia, Dalphon.

The same enter, VASHTI veiled with two women attendants. HAMAN leads the queen to a dais where she unveils and the princes pay homage with HAMAN.

HAMAN. O Queen and ye wise men of Persia, it now behooveth us to state our griefs, subdue the impious pride of slaves; take vengeance on these Jews. Prince Adalia, speak, and she, our queen, shall be our arbiter.

ADALIA. Yea, I fear them, of wit and valor too much accredited to now be met with scorn. They push us to the wall, and rise on our defeat. I fear them and I hate them.

QUEEN. Well spoken, brave Adalia. 'Tis like thee to play the coward, in whom all see the hero.

DALPHON. I fear them not—but they profane our groves, they worship not as we, they mock our gods and force their sacrilegious rites before our faces.

QUEEN. 'Tis well thought, zealous for the gods and zealously will they reward thee.

ASPATHA. I care not for the gods; 'tis theirs to look to it, if reverence due is paid not, but for gain, for that I care. I would not have this money-getting race usurp our trade and see our riches deck a foreigner. Naught can now compete with them; though beggared at the dawn, the sunset sees them robed in purple.

QUEEN. Surely this were cause for punishment. Ill-gotten is the gold that comes by magic. But speak thou, O Haman, mighty prince, beloved of the king.

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HAMAN. These are to mine as white to black —ten thousand causes have I for loathing; they are but the slightest. Between my race and theirs is hatred nourished for almost as many generations, as have my hands twice told of fingers. We hold all Jews as foes and treat them so. — — — I've for Mordecai who prates of lofty virtue, wins his way at soft and steady pace, but curses. O gracious queen, let's hear thy will; 'tis we must then obey.

QUEEN. My lords and princes, all ye do call me "queen"; so was I, so will be, if but fortune give again, in justice, all it takes: our kindly monarch's favor — — — and now I muse upon it all—what cause that I, once doted on and held so dear, am thrust away, but surely this, he, Mordecai, who else, has whispered praise of this new beauty, Esther, blinding so our king with tales of her, that he but seizes on my absence to be rid of me. Ah cruel, cruel, thus to wound a woman, one who shielded him; 'tis thus we monarchs are rewarded for our trust. That haughty head scarce bowed in salutation, as I passed, I marked it, but my heart, too full of mercy to requite with ill, took then no warning. So he rose, I fell. But how amend these evils, shall each not give advice?

ALL. Yea, yea, so shall it be, O queen!

ADALIA. Shall Haman, he who called us here, who seemed the most beset with care for vengeance, not take this matter first in hand?

ALL. Yea, Haman, let it be he.

HAMAN. I, O queen, desire it not, but since it falls to me, I will accept. I hold there is no victory, but in destruction. Hear now my plan; 'twill need but his advice and power to execute. Let writings here be made by Dalphon, Adalia, and Aspatha, unto the governors and rulers of the provinces, that they upon the thirteenth of the month Adar, cause to be killed, destroyed, (women shudder) all Jews both young and old, and their goods seized as prey. I will win the seal to set thereto from



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Ahasuerus. The danger lies in this. Yours is the safer part in execution of these writs. Wisdom is speed in both.

QUEEN. Well done, brave Haman, thou speakest as a master in the art of moving kings. Haste, lose not a moment; let this day see accomplishment of our design—in plan well formed—the king's consent obtained—the letters sent. (Aside.) She too must die, within the palace, stifled by my slaves. She shall no more have voice to win from Persian princess rights held too long to yield at glance of Jewish eyes. (Aloud.) O Princes, we may leave, assured the matter rests in hands as skilled as any that might hold it. 'Tis ours to execute his wish. I leave you then with every vow for our success, and once in power ye shall not be forgotten.

All leave but HAMAN and ZERESH, after saluting the QUEEN, who goes out first with her women.

ZERESH. I fear me Haman this doth mean thy ruin, not revenge.

HAMAN. That care I not, for nothing gives me peace while this Jew sits before the gate, and rises not to greet me.

ZERESH. Then thou shouldst well devise some other means to rid us of the man, awaiting not the special vengeance.

HAMAN. Yea, woman, thou hast spoken well, I've thought on that. Thy hands and mine shall match the purple we shall wear. (Laughs.) But I must leave thee. Get thee to the gods, that they make our cause their own.

[Exit HAMAN.]

(ZERESH gazes sorrowfully after him, and turns towards the inner room.)

SCENE IV.—Council chamber. King seated in the chair of state. Princes retire, making a low obeisance. Scribes follow, gathering together their rolls, etc.

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KING (alone). O woe of kings! since time began—the same! No trust, no faith, no honor! What care these for the state—for me? Nothing. My will supreme, but who to execute that will? No man in Persia. Absolute, impotent. I could lay all aside to be a man. Yet, how a man? That were impossible, being a god. I must seek godlikeness—must be the god. — — — But ah, gods have the power we sigh for, being men. — — — I am not even loved. Feared, yea, by all. I'll draw around the royal mantle lest disclosing nakedness they stab. A scimitar hangs in the shadow of this throne—some day a hand will draw and thrust. — — — Could I but touch one soul—true, pure! — — — — — I've thought of Haman — — Mordecai—there seems some virtue; is it seeming? I have raised them both until they stand upon the first steps of the throne—there let them grapple for the next. The king will bide his time — — — — 'twere worth it. Vashti! false, false, false, — — — — feigning love, respect, docility, spurns the sceptre and she falls. Did she not know the penalty? Yea, and knowing, did it. Stified in caress of gems, with every gift my passion could conceive and lavish. Her soul is dead. She loves naught but herself and cannot guess at aught but sham and ghastly feints of joy. She never feels. She's cursed too by ambition. — — — — Ah, curse of curses—deadliest—my grandsire's curse—my father's. What can keep from fury, one so tracked, so haunted! I've dragged my realm to Athens, and brought thence (laughs) a taste of blood—and of philosophy. — — — — My blood that once so generous gave me courage, — — — — — ah, the test of courage—here to stand as first of kings —'tis cooler every hour and hardly gives this hand the force to grasp a bauble-sceptre—'tis mockery! But dares a hand to lift against the toy. — — — I'll show that will can conquer blood. (HAMAN enters.) Hail Haman! thou art welcome.

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HAMAN. O King, live forever! The splendor of thy presence dazzles me, so little wonted to such radiance.

KING (waving him to a seat near his own). Yea, custom doeth much and habits us to things we had not dreamed of. I trust you bring some light, for light he stands in need of.

HAMAN. O King, who, who can hope to add to lustre such as thine?

KING (frowning). I speak not of my needs but of my subjects who are first, in minds of righteous kings.

HAMAN. Yea, truly, thus we pay to thee, O King, the true acknowledgment we owe to virtue.

KING. Hast thou any news of aught that doth concern the realm?

HAMAN. Yea, if I may speak, there is a matter serious which doth pertain unto thy grandeur.

KING. Speak, Haman.

HAMAN. Thou knowest, O King, that I, a foreigner and not of Persian blood, would brook no slight to strangers, were it not that first within my breast is love for Persia.

KING. I hear thee.

HAMAN. First then, my love of thee, of Persia, gives desire to speak—for this I take it I am given a place beside that throne—the greatest upon earth. (KING waving him to proceed.) My care for all that doth make Persia great, hath prompted me to send, the king remembers at his will, ambassadors who were to learn the state of Persia's provinces, and thither they have brought this word.

KING. Ah, what word brought they?

HAMAN. O King, thy mighty race so clement and so just, has ever given to exiles more than due, and they abuse this gift. A people came to dwell among us and they bring strange customs, rites, and practices. They will not, so say these witnesses, conform to ours. They have strange maxims, dreams of sovereignty,

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and scorn the sacred statutes of the King. They feed upon our hills and fields, enrich themselves in Persian commerce, to give exchange in traitor's deeds, and spread their evil thoughts among the people.

KING (growing more and more sullen). Art thou then sure of this? Who are thy witnesses?

HAMAN. Dalphon, Adalia, Aspatha, know of this.

KING. Dalphon, Adalia, Aspatha,—princes all! They know of this?

HAMAN. Yea, O King!

KING (rising). But thine the valor to disclose it. Here's my ring (handing Haman a ring) and Haman, thou art thanked. I double both thy power and wealth. (Aside, and aroused to fury.) The hour has come to be a god and I'll repay as they do. They wished to take my life, these reptiles. I scoffed at that, but they would crawl within my shadow: royalty; no—no—that's more illusive. There shall be tears in Persia; howling cries for mercy none will hear. I feel the tiger instincts of my ancestors clutch at me here (places hand on his throat). (Hoarsely.) They built their throne on blood. I'll wash in it; it needs perchance be cleansed, lest he who sits thereon be soiled with cowardice. (Aloud to HAMAN.) Saidst thou their name? — — — It matters not. I'll soon erase that name though it be the proudest of the earth. Go before me to the banquet hall and we will feast together. We'll drink this wine as pledge of redder vintage. (Exit HAMAN.) So, so, ye gods, who will not hear my cries, I'll give your ears a sound they'll ring with. (Sinks on a couch exhausted. He arouses himself, then gently turning to the inner room, he speaks.) Ah, here tonight they bring the Jewish maid, my Queen!

SCENE V.—A private apartment of the king.

Open windows show a moonlit sky. Room lighted by the stars, moon, and dim tapers. King alone upon his couch.

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KING. Ah, could there be but love and power, not power alone! Oft in my dreams—a boy—I saw beside me one both beautiful and good, whose loveliness was as a garment hiding fairest form—a soul more glorious. I cannot think it all a dream. (Goes to the window.) I wait and watch for that sweet comradeship—that something which in life makes life complete. Ah, lonely life of kings—alone, we live and die, and hew our tombs and lie alone in mountain sides, as cold as life is without love. These myriad stars look down on myriads, some carrying loads fit only for a beast—some left without a single joy—some hiding daggers in their hearts—some death, or famine preys upon—but they, the meanest, may dwell together, share their grief or joy; but we must not. — — — The gods, deaf, blind, thus give their gifts where gifts are needed not, and give not where they're needed. (Listens.) Hark, they come—'tis she, 'tis Esther. I hear the Chorus; they would bring her hither,

(KING stands listening. CHORUS chants the CXXI Psalm.

KING. Those words again—their Jewish God.

(ESTHER enters, preceded by torch-bearers, and chamberlains, who place their lights and retire. ESTHER stands alone with hands crossed, head bowed; then slowly she lifts her head and gazes long at the KING and gently moves towards him.

KING (gazing in bewildered joy at ESTHER). 'Tis she, 'tis she! O, God! 'tis she of whom I've dreamed. (Draws back, half afraid, as at a vision.) She seems a goddess—is she woman? Yea, and sweet and pure and good. (Retires farther from her, while ESTHER awaits his mood.)

ESTHER (after a long pause). What wills the King?

KING. What will I? (Aside.) 'Tis her

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voice. (Aloud.) I will that thou be blest.  
(He bows his head in his hands.)

ESTHER (half troubled, goes towards him, then stops confused). O King, I come to bring thee joy, not pain.

KING. And such you do sweet, Esther—joy! ah, joy I have not felt 'til now; and thou, dost thou feel joy?

ESTHER (hesitates, then softly says) Yea, O King.

KING. Ah, fear me not, beloved one, for thou art, thou shalt be queen, queen o'er my realm—my conqueror. I, too, would kneel to thee, (kneels to her) for said he not 'twere good to yield our homage each to each? (ESTHER draws back.) Esther, love, but let me touch thy garment's hem, but kiss thy feet. Nay, tremble not, sweet dove.

ESTHER. See, Sire, thy noble state doth not permit abasement; let me kneel to thee—I am thy handmaid. (Kneels to him—are clasped in each other's arms.)

KING. Yea, for both are one.

ESTHER. Sweet lord, my life is thine to make thee blest.

KING. Queen Esther, I am thine to make thee great, beloved; 'tis all said within that word, for she whom love hath crowned is great and blest. (Draws her to window.) Come, sit we here, and listen to the nightingales who sing of love, and look upon the stars. Doth it not seem as if those fires did warm and glow upon us from afar in benediction, Esther?

ESTHER. Yea, it seemeth so.

(CHORUS is heard in the distance chanting  
part of Psalms XIX.)

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

KING. What say they, Esther?

ESTHER. They do speak of God.

KING. Then is He near?



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ESTHER. Yea, He is near us when we wake,  
or sleep.

KING. Then—then why need we fear? we,  
too, may sleep.



ACT THIRD.

SCENE I.—Street of the city near the King's gate. Guards, citizens passing. MORDECAI, in sackcloth, haggard and restless, stands apart moving his hands in agony. —

MORDECAI. Nay, nay, it cannot be. I will not think it so, or I'll go mad. Yet 'tis so—for he allowed the price of blood—thy blood, O race of God! — — — Have we borne all for this? It cannot be. — — Thou hast not counted so our evil deeds, that we should thus be punished. Thy shadow, pierced with thunder, is more kind than human smile. (Sits upon a stone and thinks aloud the history of the Jews.) In ages long ago Thou didst choose us, dread Elohim—our sires and grandsires gave lives and goods to Thee, and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, each received Thy promises. Thine angels talked with them as man to man. Thou didst cherish them upon the plains and draw them on through Nature's prodigies, and wolfish wiles of kings, 'til they possessed their heritage. O glorious land! for Thou didst then appear upon her altars. They—Thy people—brought the beaten work, the shittim wood, the vessels of pure gold, the linen, scarlet, blue, and left within Thy walls a priceless imagery. A throne Thou placedst there, eternal, fixed—and he did sit thereon, Thy man, beloved of Thee—King David—he and Solomon, the wisest among kings — — and then — — ah, let me not behold what follows — — the years between that hour and this—bring tears, the bitterest, Jew can shed. (Bows his head and groans.)

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(A procession passes, Haman and suite going to audience of the king, then Princes, and last, a band of Jewish suppliants going to ask favors of Ahasuerus, pass, chanting a Psalm.)

SAME. Yea, holy strains our fathers wrote, and sang and loved—they tell of what shall be. — — Thou still art power and might and love, and shalt be. Israel, once so cursed, shall rise, the vision saith, in grandeur yet unknown, unguessed. There shall be days — — Immanuel — — our race is God's. (Rousing himself.) I see in one and only one our hope. 'Tis Esther, but a child, my child. — — — Ah, God! I felt it. She must break this flood of hate with her poor fragile hands. — — She, yielding, sweet and tender—must be won by force of stronger will to dare for all her people. I cannot go to her, and will my word be burning with my purpose? — — There's Hatach—mayhap he's sent of God.

SCENE II.—(Hatach passes quickly by the guards and goes up to Mordecai.) Approach, my son.

HATACH. Ah, father, I've come to share thy grief and comfort thee, or mix my tears with thine.

MORDECAI. No comfort seek I, son, but one to act. When I have told thee all and thou hast done thy part, then mayest thou weep. As deep an ill as ever threatened Israel, doth promise now to deaden tears.

HATACH. Ill? but surely father 'tis thy holy zeal, o'erwrought by prayers and fasts, causes these fears.

MORDECAI. Listen then. (Whispers to HATACH the plot of HAMAN and shows him a parchment as proof.)

HATACH (prostrated). Woe! horror! Ah, 'twere hopeless quite to struggle in their grasp! —Despair!—There's nothing else!

MORDECAI. Let my years teach thee. Oft

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we touch on hope's clear radiance, when despair's chill twilight fills the mind: then God's voice says, "Let there be light," and light doth come. But now I prayed for one—thou'rt he. Go thou to Esther—carry all these news—plead the cause of Israel—tell her I send thee. I command, entreat, that she bring these intents unto the king. That thou mayst give her courage, being weak, be thou courageous, earnest, firm, not over harsh, for she's not used to harshness.

HATACH. I go, but how shall I have audience?

MORDECAI. Take this my ring, ring Ahasuerus gave, 'twill open every door. Be gone, and peace be with thee. I'll await thee here.

HATACH. Good father, I am gone.

[Exit HATACH.]

SCENE III.—Private room of Queen Esther, furnished in delicate colors. The two girls are seated talking, JUDITH at ESTHER's feet.

JUDITH. Then seems he tall, and grand, and walks he so? (rises and mimics a majestic carriage) and does he wear his crown?

ESTHER (laughing). Ah, Judith, thou art full of drollery, and giv'st me joy amid this stateliness, as bird in glowing branch of wood. Nay, nay, he's but a man, and doth but wear his crown that he may awe those less than he; (blushes) he is but man to me, so wise and good and gentle.

JUDITH. Gentle! Ah, mistress, mistress, here I see thy arts; thou winnest all, and this mighty king doth lay aside his state for thee.

ESTHER (dreamily). Yea, Judith.

JUDITH. Nay, tell me how he speaks, and what his mien, and is he sad or gay?

ESTHER. He doth say all kind things, my Judith, from the heart, and such as we and all would like to hear, and he is gay—but then a mood more stern and sad doth come—and I half fear the king may show himself. I hear his mighty heart throbbing in pulses most like

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pain—I tremble. Believe me, kings, they too have griefs, both deep and wild, we simple girls can never feel, or guess at. (In revery.) I would, I would, I knew his thoughts; 'tis strange to love and not to know, and yet I think we cannot love in ignorance.

JUDITH. Ah, sweet, thou hast lost all thy heart 'tis plain, nor left a little spot for us thy kin—thine own. I hate thy king, this tyrant. (Weeps.)

ESTHER (laying her hand on JUDITH's head). Nay, Judith, hate him not, because I love him; so 'tis, girl, so must be ever. Thy king will some day come and he will leave thee little room within that loyal heart for me. Yet still I count not so. 'Tis love, the one sweet love of man for maid, and maid for man, which opens all the heart and lets in floods of love, until there's place for all but hate—ah, baleful word—(makes a gesture as if putting it from her) more baleful thing! We, sheltered here, two birds so soft and warm, beneath sweet brooding love, what may we fear? Nay, Judith, leave no place for foolish sense of wrong. Go, bring thy lute and sing to me.

JUDITH (kissing Esther's hands). Forgive me, queen and friend. I love thee so I half forgot that he can love thee more, so claim more love from thee. Thou art so dear, I lay my love before thy feet. I will no king, but thee, my queen.

ESTHER. Dear heart, thou wast forgiven before 'twas asked; my sister art thou, none so dear and true. So dear and true a place hast thou within my heart, thou need'st not ask another. Go, get thy lute and sing a song of love, low, tender.

JUDITH (brings her lute, looks up archly and sings).

## SONG OF RUTH.

“Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou

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goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

(ESTHER leans on her hand in revery. A

knock. JUDITH springs to the door.

ESTHER assumes half reluctant-

ly a pose of dignity.)

ESTHER. Who can arrive unlooked for? Perchance they come to fetch me to the king.  
SCENE IV.—HATACH enters, abstracted, anxious; both girls approach him without ceremony.

ESTHER (aside). Ah, almost in my joy another's grief's forgotten. (Aloud.) Surely 'tis Mordecai doth send thee hither? (HATACH, still silent, sighs, groans; girls, half afraid, draw him to a seat.)

JUDITH. Nay, speak, good Hatach.

ESTHER. So it's my father's grief that troubles thee? Thou must speak; thy queen commands thee.

HATACH. Yea, Queen, and 'twill require a queenly act. (In distress half rises.) (Aside.) Nay, nay, 'twill crush them both, (roues himself) but speak I must. (Sadly, slowly, commences his recital, while the women are each moment more excited. Esther grows pale and grasps the couch upon which she is seated.) Shall I relate such horrors as will cause thy heart to break, sweet Esther?

ESTHER (turning frightened towards him). What! the king? Nay, not the king?

HATACH. Nay, nothing of the king; yet all of him,—but hear me.

ESTHER (more calmly). Speak, speak, dear Hatach, whate'er thy news I've heart to listen.

HATACH. Hast seen the courtier, Haman? Yea, I see thou hast, that dark-browed man, who dares, I doubt not, e'en to lower on thee his looks of hate.

ESTHER. Hate! what have I done?

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HATACH. Thou hast done naught, but shalt do; learn the part thou hast to play—no doll's part, but a man's, a monarch's. I must be brief; thine uncle waits my answer. This Haman and a score of rascals like to him have planned (hesitates) a wholesale massacre of all thy race, within the bounds of Persia, thy—

ESTHER. Stay, stay, I cannot hear thee more; it drowns my sense. (Half swoons in Judith's arms. Slowly reviving, Judith gives her a goblet of wine.)

HATACH (aside). I've been too harsh; indeed I've taken half that strength she'll later need. (Aloud.) Sweet Esther, be thou calm; thou needst to be, for we, thy people, fast and pray and hope for mercy where alone 'tis found. We trust to thee, beloved of the king, to ask of him protection and redress.

ESTHER. But surely he knows not of this thing. (Aside.) 'Twill break my heart.

HATACH. That I know not. Thou must use thy woman's tact.

ESTHER (rises, trembling). I, but now a bride, to enter where he sits in state august, to plead against this mighty coalition, use my little love, but just attained, and lose it all. Nay, tell my uncle he doth ask too much of Esther; (aside) but said I not to God, and him, I would obey? (aloud) She's far, ah, far too weak for such proud show of power.

HATACH, (rising indignant) 'Tis thus thou lov'st thy people and thy God.—(Lifting his hands in imprecation) Ah, heathen halls! once foot set here, the soul is drowned in shame! (ESTHER swoons.)

JUDITH. Go, shame, O Hatach! My love of her cries out against thee; man, thou seest not her soul. She'd die for Zion; but 'tis strength she needs, not threats, abuse. (Arouses Esther.)

ESTHER. (slowly, half sobbing) Go, Hatach, tell my father, he doth ask my life, (and why not life, were love away) for who, uncalled, comes



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unto the king, within the inner court, he dies.  
— — — Thou knowest this.

HATACH. Then, O Queen, then, Esther, woe to us. What hope is there — who'll dare to ask this sacrifice? I go to Mordecai; 'tis now for him alone to save us. [Exit HATACH.

(JUDITH gazes sadly after him as he goes out; ESTHER bows her head in sobs.)

JUDITH. Nay, Esther, our Hatach doth do thee wrong. Weep not for what is said; what is to be, that, that must fill our hearts. — — — This king is but a man; thou saidst it just before this awful news had robbed us of our heart and brain. I tell thee, sweet, he would not break thy heart, nor take thy life. Go in to him, O Queen, and as a queen, look love and truth into his soul and fear him not.

ESTHER. Ah, girl, thou know'st not. — — — Were it my life alone, (shudders) that were given; but fruitlessly, yea fruitlessly to face one loved, and ask a boon he cannot give, and will not grant—then live, nay die forever after! — — Nay, Judith, sweet, but leave me here—I must face alone this deed—'tis not for thee, a girl and not a queen. [Exit JUDITH.

SCENE V.—ESTHER alone.

ESTHER. A queen, (bitterly) a queen! why set me here—I did not ask it—and now thrust me down to death, or — — — — Nay, nay, for one brief hour I did not lift my eyes so high, dreamt not of crowns—I only loved the fields and freedom; — — — — this joy, this joy of love, so full it sweeps all being into rhythm, why give, to take away? — — — what woman's heart can bear it! — — May it not be a nightmare conjured by my foster-father's fasts and vigils? (shrieks) Nay — — 'tis true, (covers her head in terror, then rises, wildly walks the room.) — — I cannot have it true, — — my kindred tortured, — — butchered! — how live then? (Sinks exhausted upon a couch.)

SAME. Yea, I see the way; 'tis sacrifice alone God asks, sacrifice? Obedience! — — —



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Obedience I give — — we strive and cry—  
would change the course of stars and fight that  
will—a law throughout His universe. — — Ah!  
God, forgive, forgive thy child — — teach me  
that will. — — This man I love, he too is but a  
child — — forget the king, the willful, impious  
king, and pardon him, for what he knows  
and does—for what he does and knows not.  
(Prays.) (JUDITH re-enters, beckons HATACH  
who follows.)

JUDITH. (Softly) Esther!

ESTHER. (Slowly) Is it thou, and has the  
moment come so soon? (Arises, then with maj-  
esty addresses them) Go, Hatach, go thou to  
Mordecai, — — tell him I will obey God's will  
and his. — — I go, (hesitates) unto the king,  
and if I perish, then I perish.

[Exit HATACH, bowing low.

(JUDITH falls weeping upon a couch.)

ESTHER. (Erect, rapt in holy ecstasy, listen-  
ing to the Chorus heard faintly from a distance  
—Psalm CXXXVII.) Yea, He alone doth con-  
quer—and He will.



## ACT FOURTH.

SCENE I.—Palace at Shushan. Audience  
chamber of the king; lofty hall with pillars.

King paces the hall, takes a roll from his tu-  
nic and reads.

KING. "Be wise therefore, O ye kings, be  
instructed, ye judges of the earth." — — Ah!  
Who shall teach us wisdom, set so far above all  
others? 'Twas Solomon alone who gave us  
this example. As a child, well I remember  
there were tales of him, my father told, of wis-  
dom, hardly common unto men, or kings. — —  
(Sits musing and turns towards the throne.) —  
— A throne where lions crouch to leap, devour.  
What can you know of wisdom, meekness? the  
gentlest among creatures born, the lamb, sym-  
bolic of that virtue—'tis written here (touches  
roll) again, again. I find men are as wolves

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and treat them so; they'd feed on me; my teeth hold tightest, so they perish. I am left to loathe myself. — — Could we so rule, so let men feel our sway, but as caress, not wound! Could it awake in them such thoughts as start to life in me, when she is there, and gives me all desires of good, in one: to live and die for her! — — — O gloomy walls of tyrants, my will that would arise in holy, happy deeds, breaks here against unfeeling stone. I hear about me whispers:—"Know no law but tyranny, hold hard, strike close,—repent not, nor forgive. — — 'Tis treachery you're paid with, — — give them treachery. — — From Scripture unto deed, how long a step! (Mounts the throne.) He who stands here, leaves mercy at his feet. SCENE II.—(Enter Herald and nobles, pressing close to the throne according to rank, HAMAN first. Princes demur.)

KING. Nay, let there be no strife for precedence. The king sets men where they're to stand and none shall overstep, and live. 'Tis Haman's place. (Princes fall back.) 'Tis surely little due to Persian princes, he, the king, is seated here (murmurs). Yea, from him, (points to HAMAN) an Agagite, he is left to learn of those who set their wills against his majesty. (Murmurs of surprise.)

MEMUCAN. O King, live forever! We stand here confounded, but we claim the right to lift our voice in praise, that Persia so is served, e'en by a stranger (lowers at HAMAN); — — — but might we know the price of honors so bestowed?

KING. Nay, price and service are the king's to speak of at his leisure. — — Thine to see, a chance as flagrant is as nobly seized another time. — — Thou'rt quicker far to pluck another down, than guard one placed above thee, Memucan. I charge thee smooth thy brows, or thou'lt have cause to frown. — — — — Dalphon, Adalia, Aspatha, ye too have thanks

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for vigilance, that's wanting to these others. 'Tis not enough to bask in rays divine, when shadow, small as smallest hand, crosses those rays. Your service first is finest flattery, without which, flattery, like a costly dress, conceals a shrunken form. — But he will speak, the thing commands his pleasure. It is this: a people, exiles, starving subjects of his bounty, bring to provinces remote, their rites, their laws, and teach, with force of impotence, ingratitude, and scorning of our laws and statutes to others, and profane those sacred acts, the pillars of our realm, which alter not, nor shall be altered. What say you all, should such things be in Persia and your king be ignorant?

ALL. Nay!

KING. Then 'tis his will that they be punished.

ALL. Thy will, O King, is just.

KING. Yea, ye say well. He hath decreed and Haman hath his ring, as guerdon for his act and of that will be the proof. They all shall die.

ALL. They all shall die.

(ESTHER stands at the door. At these words she falls, half-swooning, into the arms of two women attendants.)

MERES. Might we but know, O King, the name of traitors such as these?

KING. (Seeing ESTHER, starts.) Ah! (All turn towards the queen who stands, white and trembling, gazing at Ahasuerus.) (Aside.) What brings her here against our law and at this thought of death? I fear me it is ill. (ESTHER swoons again.) She seeks for some one.

HAMAN. (Pale as death.) (Aside.) Ah, she has come to tell it to the king, we are betrayed!

(ESTHER discovers HAMAN, clutches at her mantle, staggers, then arouses herself, smiles.)

KING (extending the golden sceptre towards her) Queen Esther, approach the throne. (ESTHER, with a low cry of gratitude, pros-

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trates herself before the king, who whispers, lifting her). My love, forget not thou art queen, these are thy subjects. — — — (Aloud.) Why hast thus honored Ahasuerus and his court, O Queen? (All make obeisance, HAMAN lowest of all.)

KING. (Holding ESTHER's hand). Speak, withhold not thy request, were't half the kingdom, it is thine.

(ESTHER raises her head timidly, gazes upon him, gradually gains assurance, looks upon the court.)

ESTHER. If it seem good unto the king, then let him come, with Haman, to a banquet I've prepared for them within the court of women.

(HAMAN falls at Queen ESTHER's feet and kisses the hem of her robe. She starts back).

KING. So shall it be, O Esther; thy gracious thought shall be our pleasure, and Haman thus receives the first reward of courtiers, the favor of his queen. The king returns thee thanks, and he himself conducts thee to thy women. (Nobles make a double line through which KING and ESTHER pass—all bowing low before them at the door the king turns and addresses ESTHER aside). My life, farewell!

(Exit ESTHER and women).

KING (aside). My life! and on my lips was death! Strange, man's dual power of utterance even unto these—life, death! — — — She, and only such as she bring life. We half-souled men, disputed both by evil and by good, we only can give death — — (fiercely). Then let us use that power, 'tis all we have. (Walks back slowly and remounts the throne).

KING (aside). But why so pale? I must not have it so. (Aloud). Nobles, O great of Persia, hear him speak. The king's will is the land's; his the power to grant a generous thing, that thing abused, to ask for expiation. 'Twere his the will to rule in equity, and all may trust that will, who love their king, obey his

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laws, but he who slighteth either must repay temerity, with life. These men, their families shall be destroyed.

All. O King, live forever!

KING. Ye may retire, a feast awaits you in the banquet hall. Haman accompanies the King. We go to drink of wine Queen Esther pours. (All retire after the king and Haman).

SCENE III,—Street before the Palace. Hatach and Mordecai talking. Guards and citizens passing.

HATACH. Yea, she hath gone and we may hope to hear the humor of the king.

MORDECAI. Our God did strengthen her, for most to meekness in obedience He gives. But we shall fast and pray and bear her spirit up, where He, who gives to weakness, dwells.

HATACH. 'Twere well, I were not seen to linger longer, so, father, fare thee well. I go to pray and fast.

MORDECAI. Peace be to thee, — — — but Haman comes and his low retinue; a subtle cur, whose ill-bred nature thinks to win applause with outward grandeur. I pay to him no shamming deference, (Haman returning from feasting with the King and Esther, accompanied by nobles, servants, etc., passes and mockingly addresses Mordecai).

HAMAN. Hail, Mordecai! We bid thee hail! Why put on garb of woe when all is joy in Persia?

MORDECAI. Each heart's a realm, ruled by joy and grief. No man invades that realm, be he a conqueror?

HAMAN. But he who lives in conquerors' smiles may surely have no cause to hold this realm, as 'twere a time of siege.

MORDECAI. The noblest heart lays not bare defence to smiles, or tears, or words. An exile knows not peace, nor war, nor friends, nor foes; for all are foes to him, who worship not his God, nor love his land.

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HAMAN. 'Twere vain attempt to draw us to that God, that land with sackcloth and with tears. We deck our gods in gifts more joyous, and deem them better pleased with somewhat happier rites than these.

MORDECAI (indignant). Why stand we here profaning what no mortal lips should speak, but humbly. If thou wouldst treble my despair, speak thus of God.

ADALIA. (Others half laughing). Nay, Mordecai, we asked but so to learn, be not wroth, nor think we mock thy grief. We'll go and leave thee pain's sure solace—solitude.

(Exit Haman and suite).

MORDECAI (looking after them with haughty, sorrowing eyes). 'Tis well! ye know not God, for did ye, then would tears more salt than these that wear my cheeks, blind eyes unused to tears, and death itself and hell would seem relief, to hell within. Go, dogs, a kennel not a palace is your home.

(Exit Mordecai).

SCENE IV.—House of Haman. (Wife of Haman seated at her embroidery, rises from time to time to look out of the window).

ZERESH. He comes not yet, 'tis late — — —  
— — — I feel some sense of gloom; — — —  
I waken in a fright, at which he laughs. — — —  
'Tis surely dread well founded. — — — This conspiracy? (shudders) Nay, not them, vile remnant of an impious race, but Mordecai 'tis him I fear, and Esther; she's too fair, she'll hold a sceptre o'er the king. — — —  
(Wrings her hands). Did he know, ye gods, he'd crush us as he'd crush a toad! I know him and his blood—merciless—merciless — —  
— Ah, hate and vanity, — — hate born of vanity! Why raised so high should Haman not be satisfied, nor seek to wreck his spite on these accursed Jews—her race! (Listens—hears sounds of gay music, rushes to the door and opens to Haman and his retinue).



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HAMAN. Welcome, friends, this is the home of each.

(Servants bring in lights, guests dispose themselves on couches—refreshments are brought).

HAMAN (aside). What, wife! but half glad! and see I trace of tears, this day of all our lives the greatest—and the best? We come from audience of the king, where I before the court am placed the first in Persia, lord o'er princes—next the king himself.

ZERESH. Ah, joy! I feared some ill, nor thought of this.

HAMAN. What, woman, ill to me! This is but half. Queen Esther makes but for us two, myself, the king, a banquet. No man but me; what thinkst thou, Zeresh? I've riches, honor, children, thee. What can I more? (sullenly).—Yea, this I will have, obedience from this Mor-decai.

ZERESH. Nay, think not thoughts of vengeance, when all should make thee glad. — — — Come, our guests are waiting—'tis not right we stand apart.

ADALIA. I drink to thee, O Haman, first in favor of the king! (Dalphon, Aspatha, others) We drink to thee! (Haman bows).

DALPHON. Thou hast reached at last the height of glory man can come to, who's not born a king, but have a care—the gods we know are jealous. (Laughs).

ZERESH (putting out her hands imploringly). Nay, nay!

ASPATHA. I cast no shadow on the joy of friends. Haman has riches equal to his rank. He who has gold, has all. They say 'twill e'en lay ghosts. (Laughs).

ZERESH (shudders). Ghosts!

ASPATHA. I've lived for gold, but gold comes not my way, unless this venture brings it.

ZERESH. Ah! speak not more of gold, nor hint at blood!



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DALPHON. 'Tis awful, true, when men play dice and throw—upon the board poor human lives; but then 'tis done each day, in war, in trade, in statecraft. He who throws not stakes as high, may lose the same and life besides. (All drink).

ASPATHA. Here's to success and stakes. (Haman still sullen, apart).

DALPHON. What broodest thou, O Haman?

HAMAN. I think of Mordecai. (All draw near Haman).

ASPATHA. Yea, and we will give thy thoughts an utterance: he must die.

ZERESH. Ah!

HAMAN. He must obey me—yield to me obedience.

DALPHON. That he will not do. Thou know'st it well, and more, he likes thee not, and is e'en now, I doubt it not, plotting thy downfall.

ZERESH. O gods protect us!

HAMAN. Woman, hush; I can forestall the gods, act for them.

ZERESH. If he must die, let it be soon; this fear will take my life.

HAMAN. Fear! what can we fear, who have for friend a king?

DALPHON. Ah, Haman! Haman! thou art new to ways of court, and know'st not yet the length of kingly friendships. When a king has been a friend, beware.

ZERESH. Yea, let him die. (All, but Haman). Let him die.

HAMAN. So be it, and hang upon a gallows; that neck shall bend, if not before a greater, then in shame.

DALPHON. But duties now of state call us from thee.

ASPATHA. Farewell; we thank thee for this courtesy. (Exit all).

ZERESH. They're gone. — — I hate their feigned friendship. Dragon's teeth hurt less

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than words. They pay their debt to hospitality, with prophecies of evil.

HAMAN. Go, leave me woman, I would trust to no advice but silence, to devise a method for this deed. (Exit Zeresh).

SCENE V.—Same. Haman alone.

HAMAN. She doth not give me strength, but vexes me with restlessness; a child hath more of courage. (Sits moodily in a reverie). — — — Did I fear? — — — (starts), yea, did I not, when today Queen Esther came? Her words were fair, but her face had somewhat too much pallor, — — — was it dread of him, or me, or both, and doth she know our secret? Then! — — — — but no she cannot guess — — 'tis foolish questioning. — — — — — This is what I grasped at, tricked, and lied, and sold my soul for, this is grandeur, to faint at woman's smiles and shudder at her tears! — — — — — I hate her, too, poor weakling, with pallid face, quivering like a babe's. She rules the king, 'tis maddening and 'tis true. He'd scorn all leading, but a slip, a girl, can turn him with a finger! — — — If but the plot succeed, she too — (starts again). My speech must be less eloquent, ears may be pleased to listen, and retain, and if to royal ears the thing should come, his Jewess might indulge in whim of girlish laughter. — — — Fool! fool! to push toward actions, half matured. 'Tis haste that ruins rogues, and only virtue waits until decrees of heaven work out effects on earth. Ah, justice, it can wait! but he who would by evil means attain to power, complete his purposes, Time is his chance, and he rashly takes an hour, while good men trust Eternity. (Starting up). The stars shall speak. A shadow crosses my design. — — — — — 'Tis not assuring. Again I see it! away! 'Tis there! Cannot one cheat the stars.

(Servant enters, Haman starts),

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HAMAN. Again this puerile fear. Why coms't thou?

SERVANT. My mistress bids me warn thee, it is late; what you've to do must straight be done.

HAMAN (aside). Prudent! While I sit moping here, the gallows must be placed—(aloud), 'tis right, I come. (Exit Haman, followed by servant.



ACT FIFTH.

SCENE I—Bedroom of King Ahasuerus, furnished in profuse oriental luxury, hangings laden with gold, silver, and gems are parted to show a balcony, the starlit night, wide plains, and mountains in the distance. The king is seated on a couch.

KING. I cannot rest; 'tis this fair eve perchance, the jealous splendor of the day, supplanted by our peerless Persian night, — — — (Goes to the balcony). Sing, sing, sweet birds. ye roses pale, exhale in breaths of ecstasy gardens of bloom, I stretch my soul to you, its wings are opening! I rise and pass beyond those gates, enwreathed in lilies, beyond the silent plain, where night caresses sleeping herds and bends its quiet breast on lakes and streams, and still beyond where Demavend shines as an opal set in turquoise. O mount of aspiration, forehead never bowed to mortal, held high to God, unsoiled by shame, I bow to thee; greet thou thy son! Tell him why life is weary and repose comes not. (Returns to his couch), — — Something doth here oppress me. Is it traitors' blood, the pallor of the queen, or that strange sense, the swaying of the curtain brings — that there behind, lurk destiny and doom? — — — Memory and Hope, twin sisters are, brought in the arms of night and laid before each door; we open, take one in, is it she, loved most because she gave us pain before,

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inwrought within our nature, or the sister we have sought to win, dear Hope? — — (Goes again to his balcony). Stars of Persia's heaven, fires we worship, ye who wait upon our evil deeds and good, my soul is still with you. Ah glory, Nature brings to quench our tossing spirits! Suns! can ye not light my mind and drive its darkness thence. (King returns slowly to his couch, a scribe enters, bearing rolls, and a taper).

KING. Scribe, read me from thy chronicles, let's see if aught that's past, may brighten this dull mystery and questioning.

SCRIBE. I open here, O King, to where 'tis writ that Mordecai—

KING. 'Tis writ that Mordecai! (musing) — — I had forgot the thing.

SCRIBE — — — that Mordecai, the Jew, did warn the king of Bigthana and Teresh, chamberlains, whose impious hands were set to spill the blood of heaven's son.

KING (aroused). Ah, Mordecai, and I'd forgotten thee! Ingratitude ne'er found in any king, but one in name alone. Call some one—speedily, let Haman come. (Exit Scribe). The highest of the land shall bow before this Jew, who saved the king his life. — — — Poor life, was't worth the saving? — — — Yea, said I not—: "There's virtue?" His mien is good, and noble, but of late, he comes not oft to court, likely 'tis this affront prevents him. — — — She, my star, has outshone lesser stars, made me forget a friend. Forget a friend! No, no, who could, there being so few! (Re-enters Scribe). Read on.

SCRIBE. Then came Mordecai, the Jew, and told how he had heard the plotting of two men and knowing voices, passed whence voices came, discovered Bigthana and Teresh; how the same determined soon, occasion offering to seize upon the person of the king, (O terror!) and wound him to the death. — — — Thus, O King, 'tis writ.

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KING. Is mention there of any praise for such a deed, reward, or honor?

SCRIBE. Nay, O King, I find it not.

KING. O shame! Dishonor! Why bring they not this Haman?

SCENE II.—Knocks. Scribe opens to Herald and Haman, torch-bearers bring in lights.

KING. Come hither, Haman, hear a thing unheard of! A man hath kept from death a king, and he goes unrewarded! What shall be done to one, whom he in such a debt, desires to honor?

HAMAN. O King, thou'rt not this king! Thou dost remember all, but evil. But if, to add to kingly gifts bestowed, more honor, is thy will, then might be brought the horse the king doth ride upon—and he who did this service placed thereon, in royal garments clad, be led in pomp throughout the city, and proclaimed the man, the king delighteth most to honor.

KING. Nobly planned and, Haman, 'twill be done. Go, fetch the steed, which thou shalt lead, and place in royal robes upon the courser, Mordecai.

HAMAN (drawing back, terrified). Mordecai!

KING. Yea, Mordecai. Why startest thou? This Jew hath saved my life, I will that he be honored.

HAMAN (aside). Then I am lost. (Aloud.) Yea, O King, I do thy will.

KING. Good Haman, go; be praised for this, as all thy loyal deeds. Thy queen shall add her praises soon; we go to meet her. Haste, begone. (Exit Haman, Herald, servant and torch-bearers).

KING (to Scribe). I now must rest and lay aside this weariness before the feast, leave me. (Exit Scribe). This tardy recompense doth fill me with remorse, yet joy is in my heart, aye, exultation, for I believe it was for love of me he did the thing, not for praise, nay, not for praise. (King enters his robing room).

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SCENE III.—Small banquet hall in the apartment of women, hung in crimson, opening upon a court, where, through pillars, are seen flowers and fountains; music is heard from the concealed Chorus. The room is lighted brilliantly with tapers. Esther and Judith walk arm in arm, superintending the arrangements of the feast. Esther is in regal dress, glittering with gems, upon her head a diadem. Maids move noiselessly about with flowers, fruits, etc.

ESTHER. Is it well? Will't please his eye? Can aught be bettered for his comfort? See, Judith, am I fair? (Judith, very pale, gazes at her anxiously).

JUDITH. Thank God this night, for thou art fair indeed.

ESTHER. Ah, beauty, fragile weapon, when a nation's life is challenged! Was it not the Grecian legend, that a woman's graces wrought the curse of Troy?

(The Queen and Judith tremble as they watch the king approach).

ESTHER. Go, Judith, go and pray, he comes.

JUDITH. Be thou calm, and God be with thee! (Exit Judith).

KING. So, Esther, I have come to feast with thee. I am alone, that I might have the rarest first,—thy smile. (Esther lays her hand on his arm).

ESTHER. Then thou dost love thy Esther?

KING. Love her! She is my life, its all, its sum.

ESTHER. Then thou'lt not take it from her?

KING. I could not, since she and Love are one.

ESTHER. Ah, I trust 'tis so, I will believe it.

KING. Nay, Esther, not so shalt thou speak: "I trust, believe." "I know" is all that I will hear.

ESTHER (looking into his eyes). I know.



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KING (taking her to a seat). Then am I happy. I feared thou hadst some care. 'Twas only this poor timid heart, still guessing at the puzzle! Foolish Esther! Love is no puzzle. Once I knew it not, and thought it such; but now I know it needs but simplest heart to understand. Thine is a child's heart, Esther—and it soon will learn.

ESTHER. Yea, but I fear—the king—a little, not the man.

KING. Ah, Esther, there's no king for thee, thou art my sovereign, but unused to reign, thou takest naught for granted, but shyly wieldst thy power—a power as boundless as my soul, and that is boundless as this dusky sphere, all set with eyes of love.

ESTHER (archly). Then I will test my subject, see if he doth hear me and obey.

KING (bends towards her, kissing her hand). See, I kiss the hand that wields the sceptre, but I fear it not, 'tis far too soft and warm.

(Esther rises slowly, moves away). (Aside). Yet, little hand, thy grasp may save a people, (prays), hold Thou my hand! (firmly) — — must save a people!

KING. Why leav'st thou me?

ESTHER (gaily). My subject doth rebel already?

KING. Nay, Esther, thou'rt not happy. I can read thy flower-like face. It droops. Is it hard to use the sceptre and to rule o'er one alone? (Draws her to him). Well, leave that to me! Obeying is the easier part, believe me. But hither comes thy guest, another subject. — — Look, he feels thy power.

SCENE IV.—Haman, pale, his eyes fixed on the queen, enters and makes a low obeisance. Esther watches him, shuddering; then, arousing herself, motions them both to the couches. Servants enter, bringing rare dishes, wines, confections, etc. King, Esther, and Haman converse in low tones. Esther is seen occa-



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sionally to tremble violently. Wine is served.

KING. We drink to thee, O Esther!

HAMAN. O Queen, we drink to thee!

(Esther rises, very pale).

KING. What is thy request, O Queen?  
The king cannot deny thee. Speak!

ESTHER (gasping as she speaks, all but falls, recovers herself. Haman becomes livid). I ask my life.

KING (rising, amazed). What jest is this?  
Abuse not power, O Esther!

ESTHER. O King, if I've found favor here,  
(reaches out her hands imploringly) grant me my life, my people's life as well!

KING (aside). Has she gone mad? (Aloud).  
Esther, seem not so, but calm thyself (seizes her hands). My life and thine are one.

(Haman, unnoticed by the king, has fallen at their feet).

SAME (aside). 'Tis sudden illness, she's estranged. (Aloud). Dear Esther, speak, thy king commands thee.

ESTHER. We are sold, I and my people, both are sold to be destroyed, to die. — — Had we been sold for slaves, I should have held my peace, — — but sold for slaughter!

KING (wildly). Who dares but to conceive the thing?

ESTHER. Haman.

(Haman groans).

KING. Haman!

ESTHER. Our enemy is Haman.

KING (stoops over Haman, controls himself and walks into the garden).

ESTHER (alone with Haman). I'd pity thee, didst thou not deserve thy fate.

HAMAN (raises his head, draws himself upright, with defiant air). Hear, O Queen, thou too art pitiless as he. I have but served the state and him. 'Twas but sedition and seditious men, not thee, I wished to perish.

ESTHER. Nay, Haman, I'm but a girl, if queen; I know a lie. I see it in thy looks. I've

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seen it there before. Thy wicked heart has played this part, but once too oft, and this time, one who suffers not evil to thrive eternally, hath stricken thee.

HAMAN (falling at Esther's feet). O life! Give but my life, 'tis all I ask!

(He crawls upon couch by Esther's side. Esther draws back. The king enters, seeing him there, utters a cry of rage).

KING. He dares! he dares to touch the queen! (Calls.) Guards! (They rush in). Take him. He dies!

(Haman's head is covered; he is taken out).

KING (frenzied). Bring me Mordecai. — — Call in the court. What was done in secret, shall be blazoned in every hall in Persia.

SCENE V.—The King sinks upon a couch. Esther stands apart, the court enters, and Mordecai, with Jews.

KING. Let all men know there's done a thing this day in Shushan, shall be told, while ages last, for infamy: the deed and its requital. He sent one to his death, the first, but not the last, for here on Persia's throne, her monarch has been taught to punish innocence and honor crime, and one hath set himself to — — — he will not speak it, no mouth shall utter it; but she, the queen, hath brought in truth and right, where death and lies were sought. — — — Ah, monarchs of a mighty race—Cyrus, Darius, names a god may tremble at! Is there not sprung from ye a man of ancient fire, that may consume such men to ashes? Shall wickedness exult and Ahasuerus live? No, by Rustem, by our heroes, by her God, justice still shall have her throne in Persia! Go, remembering this.

(Exit all but king, Mordecai and Esther).

ESTHER (drawing Mordecai towards the king, who sits with bowed head. She lays her finger on her lips). Wait, he's yet but half appeased.

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KING (slowly, sadly, as if waking from a dream). Thou, Mordecai?

ESTHER. O King, my foster-father, he who brought me to thee?

KING. Who brought thee to me? Mordecai, thy foster-father? Then two lives, I owe to thee, my friend. (Mordecai stands with bowed head).

SAME. Yea, — — — and more than life, that honor lives in Persia! Since through thee came Esther, and through her, is known this treachery.

(Chamberlain enters).

CHAMBERLAIN. O King, a gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had prepared for Mordecai, stands in his house. (Esther clasps Mordecai's arm in terror).

KING (in a terrible voice). Hang thereon Haman. (Exit Chamberlain).

(Esther draws Mordecai to a couch).

ESTHER. O King, He who avengeth innocence shall give thee peace.

KING. Peace! Not yet, O Esther. Something burns me here. (Touches his breast). The Jews! That he did dare to plot against thy kin! To lay — — Nay, I must not think! Here, Mordecai, take hence this ring and while this realm of Persia feels me master, it shall bring redress unto thy people.

(Mordecai bows low and withdraws).

(Esther seats herself upon a low stool at the king's feet, he lays his hand upon her head).

KING. Esther, beloved! Had I lost thee and honor! My love, my wife!

ESTHER. Nay, but He willed it not to be. He gives thee both again, that thou may'st trust to Him. Ah, could'st thou learn that He alone can guard such treasures!

KING. I would learn, Esther.

(Chorus is heard softly chanting Ps. LVII).

— — — — —

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Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.

I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people:  
I will sing unto thee among nations.

For thy mercy is great unto the heavens,  
and thy truth unto the clouds.

Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens:  
let thy glory be above all the earth.

— — — — —  
KING. Teach me to know thy God.

ESTHER. Yea, love, my King, a child may  
learn to know Him; for he who doth obey and  
love is nearest, knoweth God.

[CURTAIN.]



## NOTES.



Page 7. CHORUS.—The Persians, ancient and modern, have been distinguished by a great love of poetry. Their feasts and festivals and daily home life were adorned by recitations and frequent use of elaborate poetical imagery. It has not seemed out of place to consider them as admiring the Jewish choristers and admitting them as a part of court entertainment.

AHASUERUS.—Ahasuerus is supposed to be the Xerxes of history, who was defeated at Salamis, which engagement he watched from a mountain side overlooking the bay. This was the second check of Persian power in Greece.

LEATHER BANNER.—The leather banner, the apron of a blacksmith, snatched in time of popular uprising and borne as a standard, has been, from ancient days, famous in Persian history.

Page 10. PERSIAN DECORATIONS.—The richest ornamentation of the palaces of this period, were tiles of exquisite carving and design. A portion of the interior walls of the palace of Shushan has been brought to France and set up in the Louvre, with parts of pillars of great height, whose capitals are massive heads of bulls.

Page 23. USE OF THIRD PERSON SINGULAR.—Persian monarchs are accustomed to use the third person singular in speaking of themselves. We have the same ceremonious use of this person in Italian.

AGAGITE.—The King of the Amalekites was Agag, who was slain by Samuel's own hand.—I Samuel xv:33.

A tomb called the tomb of Esther and Mordecai is still standing at Hamadan.

For Persian costumes, dress, etc., see Rawlinson's "Ancient Monarchies," "Persia and the Persians," by S. G. W. Benjamin, United States Minister to Persia, etc.





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